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Seeing life steadily: Dorothy Emmet's philosophy of perception and the crisis in metaphysics

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ABSTRACT


The aim of this paper is to outline Dorothy Emmet's (1904–2000) account of perception in *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (published in 1945). Emmet's account of perception is part of a wider attempt to rehabilitate metaphysics in the face of logical positivism and verificationism (of the kind espoused most famously by A. J. Ayer). It is thus part of an attempt to stem the tide of anti-metaphysical thought that had become widespread in British philosophy by the middle of the twentieth century. Emmet does not fit neatly into the traditional story of twentieth-century British philosophy. She draws on figures like A. N. Whitehead and Henri Bergson much more extensively than figures like Russell or Moore – and thus straddles the so-called 'analytic-continental divide.' My aim in this paper is to put Emmet on the map of twentieth-century British thought by outlining her philosophy of perception, highlighting her proposals for a way forward for metaphysics in a time of crisis, and identifying the ways she preempts movements in contemporary philosophy of perception.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to outline Dorothy Emmet's (1904–2000) account of perception in *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (published in 1945).¹ Emmet's account of perception is part of a wider attempt to rehabilitate metaphysics in the face of logical positivism and verificationism (of the kind espoused most famously by A. J. Ayer). It is thus part of an attempt to stem the tide of anti-metaphysical thought that had become widespread in British philosophy by the middle of the twentieth century. In pursuit of that aim, Emmet draws on the work of figures like A. N. Whitehead and Henri Bergson, rather than more mainstream analytic thinkers like Bertrand Russell or G. E. Moore, for inspiration. Indeed, Emmet's ideas stand in contrast

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¹Henceforth, I abbreviate *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* to 'NMT'.

to the prevailing tides of British philosophy during her lifetime. This makes Emmet a figure of considerable historical interest; she does not fit neatly into the traditional narrative of the continental-analytic divide, proposed a way forward for metaphysics in one of its greatest times of crisis, and pre-empted certain movements in more contemporary philosophy of perception. By espousing her unique account of perception and drawing out its connections to her wider philosophy, I hope to put Emmet ‘on the map’, so to speak, of twentieth-century British thought.

I focus on Emmet’s account of perception, in what follows, because it is at the heart of her wider aim in *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*,² providing a way forward (or what we might think of as a paradigm shift) for metaphysics. Emmet maintains that metaphysics, far from being of interest only to academic philosophers, can play a wider role in everyday life – by providing us with the means to “see life steadily” (NMT, 195). She draws an analogy between the work that metaphysicians do, which involves developing and coordinating ways of interpreting experience, with the interpretation of our own personal experience that each one of us engages in every day. Just as each individual is engaged in the project of seeing their own life steadily (by making sense of, or fitting together, one’s own experiences, memories, feelings, and desires), a good metaphysician should aim to see life *itself* steadily – which may require drawing on the expertise of other disciplines such as science and theology. Thus, both the metaphor of ‘seeing’ and her views on perception, more generally, are absolutely central to Emmet’s aims in NMT. As such, focusing on her account of perception is a sensible ‘way in’ to her work, particularly for those readers who are largely unfamiliar with Emmet’s philosophy.

Emmet’s account of perception has both a negative component, her critique of the ‘isomorphic’ theory of perception she attributes to thinkers like Whitehead and the early Wittgenstein, and a positive component, her defence of the idea that perception is a “*rapport*” or intermingling between ourselves and the world around us (NMT, 65). Unlike those thinkers she critiques, Emmet maintains that there is no divide between the mind of a perceiver and things which are perceived. Minds, bodies, and things in the world which we perceive, on Emmet’s view, are all ‘intermingled’ aspects of reality. This helps Emmet avoid – and move on from – the sceptical problems that arise with traditional account of perception; problems concerning how we get beyond the ‘veil of ideas’ in our own mind and how (or if) we know that our perceptions are veridical. On Emmet’s view, there is no ‘leap’ required from things in the world to ideas in the mind, since both the mind and the world are intermingled; that is, are in ‘*rapport*’ with one another.

At present, there is virtually no secondary literature or historical scholarship focusing on Emmet’s philosophy (perhaps this is not surprising: her

²Parts of Chapters VII and IX of NMT were previously published as Emmet, “Analogies in Metaphysics”.

death in 2000 puts her right on the cusp of the twentieth and twenty-first century and, one might argue, only just in the *history* of philosophy).³ Consequently, a more modest aim of this paper is to introduce readers to Emmet's philosophy and emphasise the extent to which she is an original thinker while also identifying the most significant influences on her work. With that aim in mind, I focus on NMT which was written with a relatively broad audience in mind and in which she develops her own original views, as opposed to (e.g.) interpreting Whitehead which was aim of her first monograph *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism* (1932).⁴

As part of my outline of Emmet's account of perception, I introduce her claim that traditional approaches to the philosophy of perception are attempts to answer what she calls a question "*mal posée*" – i.e. a 'badly asked' or 'bad' question.⁵ What Emmet means by this is that the framework within which traditional approaches to the philosophy of perception are situated are such that they will inevitably fail. The kind of approach to perception Emmet has in mind is one where we move from what is directly accessible to the mind, via an inference, to mind-independent external objects. Within that framework, Emmet argues, the kind of question philosophers of perception are interested in answering is: What kind of inference justifies moving from internal mental representations to external mind-independent reality? As Emmet sees it, the most popular (and natural) way of responding to this question is to defend a version of indirect realism whereby we infer from the *structure* of our perceptions that they must have been caused by an external world with an isomorphic structure. However, she argues that this theory, which she calls "isomorphism", fails to establish, on rationally justifiable grounds, that our perceptions are veridical. This is where Emmet's own view that perception is a kind of '*rapport*' comes in. Our starting point, she maintains, should be an acceptance of the fact that we (our minds *and* our bodies) are closely intermingled with the rest of reality. Philosophy of perception,

³Exceptions include Leemon McHenry's entry in a chapter on "Whitehead's Contemporaries" in *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought* (McHenry, "Whitehead's Contemporaries"). See also Turner, "Deflated Functionalism" for a paper on Emmet and the sociologist Robert Merton. Emmet also appears briefly in the conclusion of Wiseman, "Metaphysical Thinking", 91. In this paper, I go further than these papers, which focus on Emmet's connection to more established figures, and emphasise the degree to which Emmet was an original thinker. Aside from these papers, I am aware of a handful of scholars working on (or who plan to work on) Emmet's philosophy in the future, including Lawrence Blum. In particular, my reading of *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* was informed by a talk given by Fraser McBride in Durham in 2022 (<https://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk/british-twentieth-century-women-philosophers-on-science/>). When it comes to the biographical details of Emmet's life, alongside McHenry's paper, I am indebted to obituaries in *The Guardian* and *The Times* from 2000.

⁴Emmet would continue to discuss the topic of perception in her writings on Whitehead and process philosophy (see, e.g. Emmet, "Whitehead and Alexander"), but NMT contains her most sustained discussion of the topic – and is the most revealing when it comes to her own views.

⁵The notion of 'bad questions' in philosophy has also been explored in contemporary scholarship such as, e.g. Taylor and Vickers, "Conceptual Fragmentation".

in turn, should be about understanding that ‘*rapport*’, rather than making sense of an inference from internal perceptions to an external world.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section One, I outline the key proposals Emmet defends in *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, including her views concerning the purpose of metaphysics. In Section Two, I lay the groundwork for my reconstruction of Emmet’s account of perception. Emmet sets her view against three standard accounts: naïve realism, idealism, and phenomenalism. I outline Emmet’s criticisms of each as well as her more detailed critique of isomorphism. In Section Three, I reconstruct Emmet’s own account of perception and her claim that perception is best understood as our sharing a ‘*rapport*’ with the rest of reality. I also demonstrate that Emmet is drawing, explicitly, on Whitehead and, more implicitly (I argue), on Bergson in developing this account – thus identifying the two most significant influences on her philosophy of perception.

2. Emmet and *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*

In this section, I provide some background to and an overview of *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, paying particular attention to Emmet’s claims about the purpose of metaphysics. In the sections that follow, I focus on the more specific issue of Emmet’s account of perception which, as I previously stated, is central to her attempt to rehabilitate metaphysics and, more specifically, her claim that metaphysics is about “seeing life steadily”.

Emmet was a prominent and well-connected figure in the British philosophical scene throughout the twentieth century, as evidenced by her position as President of the Aristotelian Society from 1953 to 1954 and recounted in her 1996 memoir *Philosophers and Friends: Reminiscences of 70 Years of Philosophy*. Towards the end of her life, she was part of the Cambridge-based group the ‘Epiphany Philosophers’ along with (amongst others) Richard Braithwaite and Margaret Masterman.⁶ Prior to that, Emmet was also said to have had a huge influence on the philosophy department at Manchester University. She was head of the department for two decades and (according to an obituary in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2000) “built it up from a handful of students and a single lecturer to 400 students and a strong and varied staff”.

The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking was written in 1944 (NMT, vii), when Emmet was in Manchester, and published a year later – a relatively early point in her career (she published into her nineties). The date of publication is significant. First, because it tells us the text was written during the Second

⁶The ‘Epiphany Philosophers’ were primarily interested in the intersection of philosophy with religion and theology. Emmet was clearly interested in such matters prior to her involvement with the group, as evidenced by the fact that she dedicates three chapters of NMT to religious and theological analogies (Chapters V, VI, and VII).

World War, as Emmet puts it, a time when “we have few opportunities of face-to-face discussion” (NMT, v).⁷ Second, because, according to Emmet, it was a time of crisis for metaphysics in British philosophy. Throughout the text, she is responding to the idea, defended by thinkers like A. J. Ayer, that the only meaningful claims are those which can, in principle, be empirically verified. This threatened to render many metaphysical (along with, e.g. ethical) claims meaningless. The aim of Emmet’s text is, at least partially, to propose a way forward for metaphysics – and her account of perception is an important part of that since, on Emmet’s view, metaphysics (generally) should be concerned with “seeing life steadily” (NMT, 195). In the Preface, for example, she writes:

We are, I believe, at the end of a period of metaphysical thinking; and the proper method and scope of a new constructive movement of metaphysics, in relation to logic, science and religion, has yet to be determined. In the meantime, though few of us may be able to embark upon systematic metaphysics in the grand style, we are perhaps justified in making the venture of writing, and so inviting criticism, if we can see a line of thought concerning method which may prove capable of further development.

(NMT, v)

Here, Emmet introduces her method and aims in writing this text. Her point at the outset of this passage is not that *the* period of metaphysical thinking has ended, but that *a* period of metaphysical thinking (i.e. metaphysics approached in certain kind of way) has. To borrow some Kuhnian terminology (Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 1), what Emmet is describing is a “paradigm” in crisis. In Emmet’s words: “it is impossible not to sense a real crisis in philosophical, and particularly in metaphysical thought” (NMT, 1). The paradigm in question is a particular way of doing metaphysics that has been jeopardized by the idea that one *must* be able to empirically verify one’s claims about reality. As a result, she explains, “we need a new Kant ... someone who can determine the distinctive nature of metaphysical thinking in relation to the new types of scientific concepts, as Kant did in relation to those of Newtonian physics” (NMT, 2). At least one way of construing what Emmet is doing in response to that crisis is that she is stepping into Kant’s shoes, seeking out the *next* paradigm, and working out if there is a new “line of thought concerning method” which does not face the same problems (whether she is successful in doing so in another question).

The approach to metaphysics that Emmet goes on to defend is one where *analogies* are of central importance. In a general sense, Emmet characterizes analogies as “coordinating idea[s]” (NMT, v). This is the sense in which, she

⁷For a monograph-length treatment of British philosophy during World War Two and its impact on the careers of several women philosophers (most notably, the ‘Wartime Quartet’ of Foot, Anscombe, Murdoch, and Midgley) – and featuring some fleeting glimpses of Emmet (including the time she collected Gandhi from the airport in her Austin 7) – see Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*.

thinks, the analogies provided by metaphysics can be of help to non-specialists seeking “a coordinating idea, in terms of which further ranges of experience may be interpreted” (NMT, v).⁸ Continuing to lay out her aims in the preface, she writes:

The general view which I am putting forward in this book is that metaphysics starts from the articulation of relationships, which are judged to be constitutive of an experience or experiences in a significant way ... A conceptual expression of such a relationship is then extended analogically as a co-ordinating idea, in terms of which further ranges of experience may be interpreted; or it is used in making a judgement concerning the nature of “reality”. I am convinced that metaphysics is in *some* sense an analogical way of thinking[.]

(NMT, v)

The starting point for metaphysics, according to Emmet, is “the articulation of relationships”. But what kinds of relationships and to what end? To understand Emmet’s approach, it is important to note that she sees the project of metaphysics as something that is ultimately motivated by the concerns, not of professional philosophers, but ordinary people – “non-specialists” (NMT, 1). Presented with the central tenets of verificationism, Emmet maintains, the non-specialist is likely to wonder: “What ... does all this discussion of verification and of the meaning of terms amount to?” (NMT, 1)⁹ Such puzzlement, she predicts, will arise because such concerns have very little to do with “what the non-specialist has always looked for from the philosophers – the articulation of ideas in terms of which he can interpret his experience” (NMT, 1). It is worth noting that by “experience”, here, Emmet has in mind the everyday or common-sense experiences that ordinary people (i.e. non-specialists) go through. She is not employing the term ‘experience’ in the way it is employed by empiricists or sense data theorists; that is, she is not talking about isolated sense data (or units of experience) that must be connected back to a wider reality (Wiseman, “Metaphysical Thinking”, 91). That is not an interpretative task that ordinary people are engaged in. Rather,

⁸For example (these are not Emmet’s examples but my own), a mechanistic materialist metaphysics might inform us that the universe is a complex mechanism, *similar* to that of a clock, while a pansychist metaphysics might inform us that there is *something it is like* to be the universe, *similarly* to how there is something it is like to be you or me. More formally, though, Emmet claims that metaphysicians employ one of five distinct kinds of analogy: (1) deductive analogies, which start with “the basic pattern of the macrocosm” and deduce more specific truths from there (NMT, 8–9); (2) phenomenological analogies, where one infers from the structure of one’s experiences to the structure of reality (NMT, 9–10; this is closely related to the ‘isomorphic’ theory of perception she later criticises); (3) “*probable hypotheses*” (NMT, 11), where one conjectures that since some aspect of reality has such and such a nature, reality itself most likely does too (e.g. William Paley’s watchmaker analogy); (4) coordinating analogies, where one borrows a “key idea” from one domain of experience and employs it in another (NMT, 12–13); and finally (5) “existential analogies” or “analogies of being”, which are employed in order to understand “an object in part experienced and in part not experienced” (NMT, 13). Emmet suggests that a statement like ‘God is Light’ is understood via an existential analogy, since we have a good grasp (via experience) of light but do not have a good grasp of God, so must infer that, to some degree, God’s light is like the light we ordinarily experience (NMT, 14).

⁹Perhaps she had Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic*, which found popular success, in mind here.

non-specialists are interested in interpreting their encounters, interactions, feelings, reflections, and so on, and rendering them (to some degree) coherent and unified. This is why Emmet claims that an approach to metaphysics in which analogies are central is appropriate; metaphysics should allow us to comprehend that which is beyond our experience (such as the fundamental nature of reality) by drawing analogies with that which is within our experience, features of our everyday lives.

Metaphysics, for Emmet, is ultimately about interpreting our experiences (understood in this everyday sense of the term). The interpretation of experience is something that Emmet thinks takes place on a personal, microcosmic level, day to day. Over a decade before Wilfred Sellars introduced the “myth of the given” in his *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956), Emmet maintains that:

we cannot think away all forms of interpretation and catch ourselves with some pellet of raw experience. To be aware at all is to have begun relating and distinguishing, and so to have begun to use some rudimentary scheme of interpretation[.]

(NMT, 4)

Her point is that we should not conceive of our experiences in an atomistic manner. Like Sellars, she would thus reject the idea that there is some bedrock of ‘given’ experiences (i.e. experiences which are as yet untouched by our faculties of judgement or interpretation) or some raw data that we *subsequently* begin to interpret.¹⁰ Raw pellets of experience, for Emmet, are a myth. As soon as, and whenever, we are conscious, we are *already* engaging in a process of interpretation – we are already, that is, perceiving the world as constituted by certain *kinds* of things and as structured in certain ways (e.g. by relations of cause and effect, or spatiotemporal relations).¹¹

This is the kind of interpretation that Emmet claims is going on at the local or personal level. As conscious beings, we are constantly interpreting experiences in a way that renders them meaningful and unified from our perspective. The job of metaphysics, she argues, is to do something similar on the macroscopic level – to bring together more localized ways of understanding experience (whether that be our own individual ‘interpretations’, or larger

¹⁰This is also connected to Emmet’s critique of verificationism (and indeed logical positivism more widely). The verificationist’s mistake, she thinks, is to assume that we can appeal to some neutral, or ‘raw’, kind of experience to verify (or falsify) the kinds of statements that, within the verificationist framework, count as meaningful. Many thanks to an anonymous referee for making this reading of the passage clear to me.

¹¹In that sense, Emmet’s view looks somewhat similar to Kant’s view that space and time are forms of intuition. One might also argue that, in line with contemporary philosophy of perception, for Emmet, all perceptual experience includes the perception of ‘K properties’ (Siegel, “Which Properties”). ‘K properties’ are properties that objects have in virtue of being certain kinds of things (e.g. being a tree, or a pine tree, is a K property). But kinds, on this view, are understood in a nominalist sense; they are categories of thought or interpretation, rather than *natural kinds*.

scale worldviews derived from distinct disciplines like science and theology) in such a way as to help us “see life steadily” (NMT, 195). Thus, the job of metaphysics is itself analogous to what each individual is doing all the time. The metaphysician interprets the world (on a grand scale) just as each individual interprets the world from their own perspective. The difference lies in the fact that the aim of metaphysics, for Emmet, is unification; bringing interpretations together. Note, however, that the idea of interpreting experience *from a perspective* (reinforced by the language of ‘seeing’ life steadily) remains important. Emmet states that “[n]o metaphysical system is drawn up from the point of view of a transcendent mind” (NMT, 195).¹² A successful metaphysics, while it strives for unity, thus cannot (and should not aim to) achieve perfect objectivity. Instead, it should aim to be one where “the power of composition may be sufficiently strong ... for some important coordination to be achievable” (NMT, 195). For Emmet, metaphysics is about piecing together different interpretations of experience in a way that is coherent, rather than arriving at an objective, transcendent, or “*sub specie aeternitatis*” description of reality (NMT, 195).¹³

This insight will be important when it comes to understanding Emmet’s account of perception. As I will argue, her approach to metaphysics is, at least in part, what lies behind her claim that the traditional problem of perception attempts to answer a question ‘*mal posée*’. In the next section, I outline the theories of perception that Emmet is responding to and the problems she identifies with those theories, emphasising the insights (particularly concerning the body’s role in perception) that will go on to play a role in the development of her own position, which I reconstruct in Section Three.

3. Emmet’s negative case

3.1. Naïve realism, idealism, and phenomenalism

I begin with Emmet’s critique of naïve realism, idealism, and phenomenalism. Some of her criticisms will be familiar but they are worth outlining because they provide insights into what Emmet thinks is wrong with the *framing* of the perception debate and provide the groundwork for her own position.

Emmet characterizes naïve realism as the view that “‘sensa’ are states of direct awareness of the surfaces of external material objects” (NMT, 20). By “sensa” or “sense data”, she means “contents of awareness (e.g. colours,

¹²Emmet acknowledges a debt here to Henri Bergson. She approvingly cites the following passage from Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*: “Here is a system of images which I term my perception of the universe, and which may be entirely altered by a very slight change in a certain privileged image – *my body*” (NMT, 32). I will say more on the role of the body in Emmet’s approach to metaphysics (and Bergson’s influence) in Section Three.

¹³Again, for Emmet, the verificationist’s mistake is to think there is a way of verifying propositions that is objective, i.e. from something like a ‘God’s-eye’ perspective.

sounds, smells)" (NMT, 19). Thus, a naïve realist posits that what we are (directly) aware of in perception *just are* the surfaces of external objects themselves. But Emmet maintains that naïve realism "can be shown to be as certainly wrong as anything in philosophy can be" (NMT, 20). She notes that "sensa can be obtained under drugs or in dreams" and argues that this "presents a difficulty", since it indicates that factors pertaining to the *physiology* of perception ("the stimulating of the receptor organ and the neural events in brain") intervene in determining the nature of our perceptual experiences, i.e. what we are directly aware of in perception (NMT, 20). In other words, whereas naïve realism tells us that what we perceive is wholly determined by those features of the external world we are in (direct) contact with, the occurrence of dreams and drug-induced hallucinations or illusions informs us that this not always the case (for an overview of a similar objection to naïve realism, see Crane and French, "The Problem of Perception", §2). The fact that in some cases it is something *other* than the surfaces of external objects that determines the contents of our awareness is enough, for Emmet, to rule out the possibility that we ever directly perceive those objects.¹⁴ She concludes that naïve realism "can give no satisfactory explanation of error, illusions and the changing perspectives of our sensa" (NMT, 25).

Idealism, for Emmet, is at the other end of the spectrum and "starts from the fact that our primary awareness is already an ordering and interpretative activity" (NMT, 25).¹⁵ An idealist, she explains, recognizes that we cannot get beyond our own experiences and thus, instead of positing a relation between what we are aware of in the mind and what exists in external reality, focuses on "some necessary systematic character within experience itself which makes sense of experience" (NMT, 26). According to Emmet, idealists place significance on *coherence* between ideas rather than a *correspondence* between ideas and the (mind-independent) world. She writes:

¹⁴This move is what Crane and French call "the spreading step" (this terminology originates in Snowdon, "Direct Perception"): the claim that "the same account of experience must apply to veridical experiences as applies to illusory/hallucinatory experiences" (Crane and French, "The Problem of Perception", §2). Descartes make a similar move in the *Meditations* when he argues that if the senses deceive us even once (which they do in cases of dreaming, for instance) then we should regard them as unreliable (Descartes, *Meditations*, 12).

¹⁵It is unclear which idealists Emmet has in mind here. There is a reference to 'the Hegelians' (although this is part of a quotation from Russell) (NMT, 28) and to Berkeley (NMT, 22–23). In a later chapter, Emmet mentions Hegel, Bradley, and McTaggart (NMT, 199), suggesting that these are the idealists she is familiar with. As Matyáš Moravec pointed out to me, it is noteworthy that Emmet is attacking idealism in 1944, well after its hey-day (at least in Britain). One explanation for this could be that Emmet saw idealism as a live issue and had contemporary idealists in mind when she put forward these criticisms. In turn, that raises the question: Who? However, a more likely explanation is that, in dealing with naïve realism, idealism, and phenomenalism, Emmet is outlining how debates about perception have proceeded *historically* or offering a genealogy of those debates. This suggestion is supported by the fact that, as I have noted, Emmet does not tend to pick out any specific idealists, but *does* identify Wittgenstein, Whitehead, and the 'gestalt psychologists' as proponents of isomorphism (indicating, in turn, that she sees isomorphism as a live issue rather than a historical one).

Sensations [for an idealist] are not to be identified with physical stimuli nor physical reactions from stimuli, nor are they representations of these, nor of physical objects. They are events within mental experience ... The distinction, therefore, between perceptual data (*sensa*) and conceptual data (ideas and propositions) is not one of kind, but of degrees of definiteness. Both are 'grounds' of inference. But the former have not yet been articulated into reasons, or intelligible necessities.

(NMT, 27)

Like the naïve realist, the idealist maintains that sensations are the (direct) contents of our awareness. But the idealist rejects the naïve realist claim that they are also identical with the surfaces (or qualities) of external objects. For a naïve realist, the phenomenal character of (veridical) perceptual experience is constituted by worldly (external) objects, while conceptual experience – experience that is not really *of* reality – lacks that phenomenal character. To put things very simply: perceptual experiences feel different to conceptual (imaginary, remembered) ones. For an idealist, however, the distinction is less clear-cut; it is merely a difference in degree. Perceptions, as opposed to conceptions, *seem* to present to us (i.e. seem to be of) a mind-independent world because they have not yet been rendered coherent with the other contents of our mind. But, in fact, for the idealist, like conceptions, they do not. If perceptions have a different phenomenal character to conceptions, according to an idealist, that is *not* because they present to us a mind-independent reality, it is because the mind has not yet properly understood their relation to (and coherence with) the rest of our conceptions.

Emmet argues that the idealist is wrong to claim that there is no strict difference between perception and conception. There *is* a difference in kind, she thinks, and this difference lies in the fact that perception relies on the *body* in a way that conception does not. To justify this claim, Emmet introduces what she calls "experimental attitudes". She writes,

For instance, I am walking in the mountains and hear a sound, I may say 'Listen, was that someone shouting?' and even if I do not walk in the direction of the sound but wait where I am in a state of expectancy and anticipation to see if the sound is repeated, I am still trying to obtain corroborative data through adopting a particular experimental attitude. Now adopting a particular experimental attitude is not a process of judging or of inference; it is a way in which we seek to obtain data for judgement and inference which we cannot obtain simply by reflection on or expansion of the logical implications of the data we already have ... I am not simply finding whether certain propositions are coherent with other propositions.

(NMT, 34)¹⁶

¹⁶Emmet's talk of experimental attitudes might be thought of as pre-empting contemporary claims about 'cognitive attitudes' in perception. For example, O'Shaughnessy claims that hearing silence, specifically, requires adopting a certain cognitive attitude (O'Shaughnessy, *Consciousness and the*

Adopting an ‘experimental attitude’ means (deliberately) putting ourselves in a position to acquire more data – that is, to have further perceptual experiences – when we want to learn more about something we have encountered in sense perception. An example would be turning to look in a certain direction after hearing a mysterious sound. For instance, if I hear a loud crashing sound behind me, I might turn around to see what is going on. What is *experimental* about such an action is the fact that it involves accruing empirical evidence to confirm, deny, or generate a hypothesis (I might suspect that the sound was caused by my cat knocking over a vase, but I cannot know for sure until I accrue more evidence, e.g. by going and having a look). We adopt ‘experimental attitudes’ when we want to acquire more (sense) data.

But what is crucial, for Emmet, is that fact that adopting an experimental attitude is not an act of the mind alone – it could not be carried out in the proverbial armchair – because it is not just a matter of reflecting on, or working through, what we already know. Adopting an experimental attitude is an act which also requires the cooperation of *the body* and, specifically, the sense organs. For instance, moving in a certain direction to try and identify the origin of a sound (or simply tilting my ears towards it to give myself a better chance of hearing it) is a *bodily* act. Not all perceptual experiences require one to have adopted an experimental attitude, but some of them *do*. This informs us that, at least in some circumstances, perception is as much a bodily action as it is a mental operation. In turn, Emmet maintains, this reveals that perception is *different* in kind to conception, which does not require the body’s input. As she puts it,

I suggest that we are introspectively aware of carrying out such percipient activity, especially in the cases in which we set ourselves to obtain sense data, and are aware of the data we obtain as varying with slight variations in the percipient activity... Through this consciousness of a process, other than the process of inference... we are aware of a distinction in kind between perception and thought.

(NMT, 37)

It turns out, then, that naïve realism was right, insofar as it posited a difference between perception and conception (between perceiving the world and merely thinking about it), even if the naïve realist’s *justification* for this difference (the claim that perception involves a direct awareness of external objects) does not hold up to scrutiny. Emmet’s own justification for the difference, which she thinks is stronger, is that it is evidenced by reflection on what it takes to adopt an ‘experimental attitude’; something one cannot do without the assistance of the body. What is more, Emmet argues, when we

World, 329) and, in language reminiscent of that employed by Emmet, characterises the act of listening as one in which we “*open the door*” or “actively make the attention *open to influence* at the hands of timbre” (O’Shaughnessy, *Consciousness and the World*, 397).

adopt an experimental attitude (and perhaps even when we have not consciously done so), we are *aware* that we are part of a process: a process of acquiring further (sense) data. We are not only aware of that which we sense (e.g. a sound) but of the fact that we are in the process of *sensing* itself.¹⁷ Taking up an experimental attitude involves deliberately beginning and sustaining such a process. Emmet's point is that in perception we are aware of ourselves as being part of this (bodily) process, but in mere thinking we are not. Thus, in Emmet's words, "we are aware of a distinction in kind between perception and thought" (NMT, 37).

Having dispatched with naïve realism and idealism, Emmet finally moves on to phenomenalism; the view that "propositions about material objects can be translated into propositions about immediately experienced sense contents and their relations to each other" (NMT, 37). It is worth noting that Emmet uses the term 'phenomenalism' to cover "the views of a number of different philosophers, from those of Kant to those of certain of the logical positivists" (NMT, 37). Phenomenalism, as Emmet presents it, inhabits a kind of middle ground between naïve realism and idealism (something like a cross-section of a Venn diagram of the two positions). On the one hand, unlike naïve realists, phenomenologists argue that an inference is required to get from the contents of awareness to external objects (NMT, 38). Although, importantly, as Emmet understands the position, phenomenologists deny that we can ever truly access external objects (i.e. they deny that such an inferential move could ever be justified).¹⁸ On the other hand, unlike idealism (and more like naïve realism), phenomenalism also posits a difference in kind between perception and conception, although she notes that phenomenologists struggle to *explain* this distinction.

For these reasons, Emmet believes that phenomenalism is preferable to both naïve realism and idealism. She writes:

[W]e shall go most of the way in accepting a phenomenalist account of the contents of experience. But we shall differ from pure phenomenalism in stressing the *responsive* character of experience, and by 'responsive', will be meant that experience will be described as arising out of situations in which the subject is relative to activities other than his own interpretative activity. We

¹⁷Emmet approvingly cites a passage from Whitehead in which he writes: "sense-perception has a factor which is not thought. I call this factor "sense-awareness"" (Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, 3; cited at NMT, 37, fn. 1). The point that Emmet and Whitehead are making here seems similar to G. E. Moore's claim that, in sensation, alongside the thing sensed (e.g. a blue sensation) we seem to be aware of our 'consciousness' of that thing (Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism", 450). As Ian Phillips puts it, for Moore, there is a "distinct element in all conscious experience, namely, the relation of conscious awareness itself" (Phillips, "Hearing and Hallucinating Silence", 345). Phillips thinks Moore is right about this and, on this basis (namely that "listing the objects of experience" does *not* suffice "to characterize experience" (Phillips, "Hearing and Hallucinating Silence", 345)), argues that since we can become aware of ourselves as hearing silence (even though such perceptual experiences lack an object) this means that silence *is* something that can truly be said to be heard. Thanks to an anonymous referee for noting these similarities.

¹⁸She has something like Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal in mind here.

shall look for a meaning of 'transcendent' in terms of the implications of elements *other* than itself in a subject's activity, and not in terms of some unknowable 'noumenal reality' behind the veil of phenomena.

(NMT, 40)

To their credit, Emmet thinks, phenomenologists (like Kant), accept that there is a distinction between perception and conception, or thinking (recall that this was Emmet's criticism of idealism). But phenomenologists nonetheless still persist in thinking that a subject's activity, whether perceptive or conceptive, is exclusively *responsive*; a matter of passively responding to either our own thoughts or to events in the 'noumenal' realm. This is where Emmet's criticism of phenomenology lies. For, on her view, a subject is as *active* as it is passive. We do not merely respond to that which is 'transcendent' (i.e. that which is, in Emmet's words, "*other than*" ourselves), we actively engage and interact with it. This is precisely what her claims about adopting experimental attitudes are designed to show; that we are actively engaged in (and also *aware of being engaged in*) the task of acquiring (sense) data. Logical positivists (who Emmet classes as amongst the phenomenologists) fail to acknowledge this. And yet, she maintains, to seek verification just is to adopt an experimental attitude – and thus, in turn, to *actively* engage with external reality. As Emmet puts it, "verification depends on the possibilities of *constructive activity* and of intersubjective discourse" (NMT, 39, my emphasis). Phenomenologists might acknowledge the latter requirement, but typically overlook the former, thinking of themselves as simply "correlating sense data" (NMT, 39). But Emmet's point is that, if we reflect on what adopting an experimental attitude (such as seeking verification) involves, "we shall find that it is impossible to set a complete barrier between the 'phenomenal' and the 'transcendent'" (NMT, 39).

Perception, for Emmet, involves an "intersubjective intercourse" or "inter-related activities" between the mind, the body, and the rest of external reality (NMT, 39). Naïve realism fails because it too quickly assumes that the mind has access to the external world, without considering why some perceptual experiences are not veridical. Idealism fails because it does not acknowledge the distinction between perception and conception and, in turn, cannot account for the possibility of adopting an 'experimental attitude'. Phenomenology fails because, insofar as Emmet understands the position, it persists with the idea that there is a barrier between what we experience (the 'phenomenal') and that which is beyond our experience (the 'transcendent') which is inconsistent with "interrelated activities" of the mind, the body, and the external world which perception requires.

By this point, some ideas which are central to Emmet's view of perception as '*rapport*' have begun to emerge. In particular, the claim that perception requires that the mind *and* the body bear a certain relation, one of 'interrelatedness' or 'intersubjectivity', to the external world is at the heart of her own

view. However, before reconstructing Emmet's account of perception, I outline her critique of 'isomorphism'. Examining her critique of this theory is crucial to understanding why she believes the problem of perception, traditionally understood, is a question "*mal posée*" (NMT, 64).

3.2. Isomorphism

As proponents of isomorphism, Emmet has in mind Whitehead, early gestalt psychologists such as Wolfgang Köhler, and the early Wittgenstein (NMT, 54) (I leave aside the question of whether she is right to characterize these thinkers as 'isomorphists').¹⁹ Emmet explains that isomorphism is a specific version of indirect realism (the view that we indirectly perceive external objects via an intermediary, usually construed as a mental representation or idea) whereby the *structure* of our ideas allows us to infer that outside the mind there must exist external objects with an isomorphic structure.

Emmet explains that the relation between our ideas and the external world is, on this view, supposed to be similar to the relation between a map and the landscape it depicts. However, she then asks, are these two cases really analogous? She writes:

We can sometimes point to such a structural relation between something we experience, *e.g.* the perceived lines on a map, and something else we can experience, *e.g.* the measured roads on a landscape, so that the former could be referred to the latter as an analogical symbol. But can we jump from phenomenal experiences and ideas to the nature of *transcendent objects*, except by assuming the 'representational' character of the former? If the transcendent is defined as that which is entirely 'beyond' or 'outside' of our experience, we have no grounds for assuming that the latter can even give us analogical knowledge of a phenomenon with something which is not a phenomenon, which is obviously impossible since it is only in so far as anything enters experience that we are aware of it to do the comparing.

(NMT, 10–11)

Emmet's point is that the structure of our ideas may not, in fact, be a reasonable ground on which to infer that the external world exhibits an isomorphic structure. She emphasises that the only thing we can compare are things we have experienced, *i.e.* our ideas (or the 'phenomena'), which severely limits our ability to legitimately claim that two things are isomorphic. In other words, while it might be natural to assume that the structure of our ideas is explained by the structure of the external world, this is still an *assumption* – it requires what she will later call an "act of faith" (NMT, 65). Continuing with the example of a map, Emmet notes that a map (by itself) is not evidence

¹⁹Note that while Emmet acknowledges a debt to Whitehead (and was clearly influenced by his 'process philosophy') it is not right to think of her as simply a 'disciple'. She explicitly seeks to move away from his account of perception (as she reads it) in NMT.

of the existence of the landscape it purports to represent (after all, it is possible to draw up a map of a fictional landscape). To know that a map is reliable, for example, we must compare the markings on the map with the landscape it depicts. But it is impossible to check, in a similar way, that something is being 'depicted' by the structure of our ideas – since, according to isomorphism, all we have immediate access to are the ideas themselves. Broadly speaking, then, Emmet's critique of isomorphism is that it *assumes* an isomorphic relation between the phenomena we perceive and things in external reality, their purported objects.

Emmet then goes on to demonstrate that the assumption that isomorphism requires does not stand up to scrutiny. This part of her critique is premised on the claim that mental representation (i.e. the way our ideas represent the world) is a kind of *symbolism*. With that in mind, she asks:

[M]ust all symbols to be valid reproduce the structure of that which they symbolize, i.e. be 'analogies' in the root sense of a proportionate structure exhibited in different terms?

(NMT, 56)

Her answer is no. There are valid forms of symbolism where the relation between the structure of the symbol(s) and the structure of what is symbolized is arbitrary. This is the case in instances of *sign-usage*; i.e. instances where one thing is arbitrarily or conventionally chosen as a symbol of another (note that a 'symbol' and a 'sign' are not the same thing for Emmet; rather, a sign is a kind of symbol that is arbitrarily or conventionally connected to that which it signifies).

The most familiar instance of sign-usage is *language-usage*, where words or sentences bear no necessary connection to that which they signify (i.e. their meaning). Of particular significance, to Emmet, is the fact that the *structure* of a word or sentence does not reflect the structure of that which it signifies.²⁰ She writes:

The order in the sentence in which the words symbolizing relations between objects occur is not essential to symbolizing those relations. The order is accidental to the grammatical rules of the language ... So we can say 'The dog lies in the manger': and 'In the manger lies the dog, or even 'Lies the dog the manger within'' and mean the same proposition.

(NMT, 57–58)²¹

²⁰One might push back against Emmet's claim here. It might be argued that the structure of a written word, for example, *does* reflect the structure of its spoken counterpart. The written word 'Yes' has one syllable, reflecting the monosyllabic sound of 'Yes' as spoken. The written word 'glockenspiel', meanwhile, is longer and reflects the three syllables of the spoken word. But it seems likely that Emmet has in mind the relation between words (written *or* spoken) and their *meanings*, where (contrary to, e.g. Platonic naturalism about words) the relation does seem to be purely arbitrary.

²¹Emmet notes that "Russell at one time advocated that a logical language should be so constructed that the word order of a sentence should always exhibit the spatio-temporal order of the things being talked about" (NMT, 58). However, she also notes that even Russell denied that this was the case in

How does this example provide a case against isomorphism? Emmet's argument starts with the premise that if isomorphism were true then ideas would *symbolise* external objects. She then argues that we would only be justified in assuming that the structure of our ideas symbolizes the structure of external objects if, more generally, it were true to say that the structure of a series of symbols is an essential part of what they symbolize. However, the case of language-usage (taken to be a paradigm example of sign-usage more generally) demonstrates that, at least in some valid forms of symbolism, the structure of the symbols used has no bearing on what they symbolize. For instance, the structural relations between the terms 'the dog' and 'the manger' remain the same, regardless of how the proposition 'the dog lies in the manger' is expressed. Unless we have a good reason to believe that the relation between our ideas and the external world is a form of symbolism where structure *is* important, we cannot conclude (or assume) that our ideas do indeed symbolize (i.e. represent) external things. But we have no such reason. Thus, Emmet concludes that we cannot assume that the structure of our ideas reflects the structure of objects in the external world.

In this section, I have outlined both Emmet's broader critique of naïve realist, idealist, and phenomenalist accounts of perception, as well as her more specific attack on isomorphism. We are now in a position to understand Emmet's own account of perception as a '*rapport*' between the mind, the body, and the external world, and why she argues that traditional approaches to philosophy of perception are addressing a question '*mal posée*'.

4. Emmet's positive case: perception as '*rapport*'

In this section, I demonstrate that underlying Emmet's critiques of naïve realism, idealism, phenomenism, and isomorphism, is a more fundamental concern about how we ought (and ought not) to approach the philosophy of perception. The following passage makes it clear that, ultimately, her concern is with the *starting point* for a lot theorizing about perception:

[T]he epistemological problem which starts from conscious mental states, and then asks how you can prove the existence of anything beyond them, is a question *mal posée*. If put in this form, there is no escape from phenomenism, or subjective idealism, since 'experience' has been defined in terms of subjective states, and the idea of an object transcending them can only be a pure act of faith or the result of an animistic projection.

(NMT, 64–65)

Emmet's claim is that there is (roughly speaking) a single problem which theories of perception typically set out to answer. Solving this problem requires

natural languages. And yet that does not undermine their validity as languages, and thus as systems of sign-usage (and, in turn, symbols).

understanding how or why we might be justified in moving from an awareness of the contents of the mind (our 'ideas') to the existence of an external reality. But Emmet's contention is that *this* problem, construed in this way, cannot be solved.²² Any such inference will inevitably require an "act of faith"; the kind of problematic, unjustified assumption that isomorphism rested upon. Emmet's view, then, is that philosophers should *stop* trying to solve this problem. Thus, as we saw on a wider scale in her approach to metaphysics, Emmet's aim is to induce a paradigm shift in the philosophy of perception. But what new paradigm is Emmet hoping to usher in?

In place of traditional attempts to address the question '*mal posée*', Emmet develops an account of perception that, she claims, is built on her understanding of the philosophy of Whitehead. Before continuing, then, it is important to introduce those aspects of Whitehead's philosophy that Emmet is drawing on. First, Whitehead's 'process' metaphysics is clearly in the background of Emmet's own approach to perception. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead defends a metaphysical system in which the notions of "becoming", "being", and "relatedness" are fundamental (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, xiii). He sets this worldview in contrast with traditional, Aristotelian metaphysical systems where the static notions of 'substances' and their 'qualities' are fundamental (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 209). Whitehead suggests that his own view, with its emphasis on 'flux', is closer to Heraclitus than Aristotle or indeed Plato, who defends a metaphysics of static 'Forms'. As we will find, Emmet similarly endorses a picture of things where what she calls "intersubjective intercourse" (NMT, 39) or "*rapport*" (NMT, 65) is more fundamental than static entities like distinct minds and the external objects they perceive.

More specifically, though, Whitehead's notion of 'prehension' is important. In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead describes 'prehension' as "*apprehension* which may or may not be cognitive" (Whitehead, *Modern World*, 86). Prehension is meant to encompass something *like* apprehension, or perception, but without *cognition*. When we *apprehend* something, he argues, it undergoes a process of unification with our mind; it is embedded within a system of intersubjective relations. Whitehead's claim is that something just like this, what he calls "the unity of a prehension" (Whitehead, *Modern World*, 87), can also occur even when cognition is not present. Emmet's own gloss on this view, in *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism*, is that prehension involves "events or concrete facts of becoming, which arise out of their inter-relations with other events throughout nature" (Emmet, *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism*, 87). She explains that a 'thing', on Whitehead's view, is a "creative synthesis of its relations to other events, or rather a

²²At least, it cannot be solved without recourse to phenomenism or idealism – two positions that Emmet has already shown to be flawed.

centre of experiencing (*feeling*) which is characterized by the way in which it feels other events" (Emmet, *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism*, 88). As we will find, in defending the idea that perception involves a '*rapport*' with reality, Emmet is drawing on this Whiteheadian insight. Having (albeit briefly) laid out the background influence of Whitehead's philosophy, we can return to Emmet's own view.²³

In order to avoid the problems faced by traditional approaches to the philosophy of perception, Emmet argues we must "go behind the explicit Subject-Object type of thinking and express this basic stage out of which the possibility of thought grows" (NMT, 65).²⁴ Those thinkers who set out to answer the traditional question of how we move from the contents of awareness to the external world address a familiar set of sub-questions: How did those ideas get there? What caused them? What justifies our inference from those ideas to external reality? Naturally, she suggests, we start with a predisposition for thinking that the answer lies in a relation between ideas and external objections (often construed as a causal relation), but the framing of the question means that such thinkers are required to *defend* this intuition. As we have seen, Emmet believes this is impossible without an 'act of faith'. Instead, she thinks, we ought to use that intuition as a *starting point*.

Emmet's 'solution' to the problem of perception, then, is quite radical.²⁵ There is a sense in which she is not really setting up her own account in

²³As well as Whitehead, it seems likely that Emmet's view is influenced by Samuel Alexander – particularly his notion of 'compresence' which looks similar to Whitehead's notion of 'prehension' (see Thomas, "Samuel Alexander", 3.1 for discussion – and thanks to Emily Thomas for pointing out the possible connection here). Alexander maintains that "There is nothing peculiar in the relation itself between mind and its objects; what is peculiar in the situation is the character of one of the terms, its being mind or consciousness. The relation is one of compresence. But there is [also] compresence between two physical things" (Alexander, "The Basis of Realism", 288). In that sense, Alexander claims, "The relation of mind and object is comparable to that between table and floor". Alexander's influence on Emmet is evidenced by (e.g.) her Samuel Hall Oration lecture from 1950, titled "Time is the Mind of Space", which is dedicated to him (Emmet, "Mind of Space", 225). Alexander is also referenced several times in *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (e.g. NMT, 21, 192, 218). Looking ahead towards the end of this section, where I make the case for Bergson's influence on Emmet, it is worth noting that Alexander (like Whitehead) draws on Bergson in his *Space, Time, and Deity* (e.g. Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, 36, 44, 140, 148). Alexander also reviewed Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (Alexander, *Matière et Mémoire*).

²⁴Like Whitehead, Emmet maintains that philosophers of perception have been misled by the fact that we *talk* as though cases of perceptual experience involved a Subject-Object dichotomy (e.g. we say things like 'I saw the moon'). Whitehead claims that those who make such an inference – from how we *speak* to what *must be the case* – commit 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness', i.e., they mistakenly take themselves to be picking out some concrete features of reality (Whitehead, *Modern World*, 66 & 74) (many thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out). This is the same (erroneous) inferential move that Susan Stebbing calls the 'fallacy of the substantive' (Stebbing, "Some Ambiguities", 117).

²⁵It is radical, but only if viewed from a particular standpoint (namely, traditional approaches to the mind-world relation and the problem of perception), for it has precedents. As we have seen, Emmet draws on the work of Whitehead and Alexander. Bergson, who is cited by Emmet in various places (e.g. NMT, 51, 56, 62, 237) and who influenced Whitehead and Alexander, similarly argues against the Subject-Object distinction (e.g. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, vii).

opposition to the positions she had critiqued (because those rival positions only make sense within the traditional way of framing ‘the problem of perception’, a framework that she rejects). Instead, she is arguing for an entirely different *approach* to the phenomenon that we call ‘perception’.²⁶ That approach does not involve an attempt to justify the (apparent) representation (or correspondence) relation between ideas and external objects, but one that takes as a base foundation the idea that we (i.e. our minds) share a ‘*rapport*’ with the rest of reality, including our bodies.

Emmet argues that the “consciousness of ourselves as arising out of *rapport*” with something (or things) “beyond ourselves” is “a pre-condition of self-conscious experience” (NMT, 65). This feeling of ‘*rapport*’ with things beyond us just is part of what it means to have an experience. In which case, the question of how and if our ideas provide knowledge of the external world never arises (and no longer needs addressing). As Emmet puts it, we should accept that “knowledge is only possible where there is some actual situation of relatedness” with the things known (NMT, 66). But this does not cause any problems, or cry out for explanation, if we take it as a “pre-condition” of experience itself that there is such a “situation of relatedness”.

What justifies taking the ‘*rapport*’, or interconnectedness, between mind and reality as a starting point for discussions of perception? Emmet’s answer to this question draws on her insight, which emerged in her negative case against alternative theories of perception, that the *body* has an important role to play in perception. Emmet describes the body like so:

In one sense, the body is but part of the total energy system called the physical world; in another sense it is the nodal point at which the physical world is organized into a particular perspective by percipient activity. From the latter point of view, it is the point of contact between percipient (mental) activity and the energetic activities of the physical world.

(NTM, 60)

²⁶In this way, Emmet’s project resembles that of G. E. Anscombe in “The Intentionality of Sensation” (Anscombe, “Intentionality of Sensation”; for discussion, see Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*). Both Anscombe and Emmet agree that there is a reason that the debate between direct (naïve) realists and indirect realists has not been settled – which is that both are trying to answer a ‘bad question’: namely, *how* the human mind cognizes the external world and what the tripartite relation of mind-mental object-external thing looks like. Emmet and Anscombe’s views differ, however, when it comes to what we *should* be doing. Anscombe defends a ‘grammatical’ approach to sensation, arguing that the focus ought to be on understanding our (verbal) *reports* of perceptual experiences, as well as those other forms of life that are shaped by the concept of sensation. Doing so, Anscombe maintains, can in turn reveal the structure of sensation itself. Emmet is less interested in moving away from metaphysical or ontological questions about perception than Anscombe, but nonetheless agrees that we ought to move on from traditional approaches to understanding perception in terms of a subject-object dichotomy. See also Margaret Macdonald’s “Linguistic Philosophy and Perception” where she also sets out to diagnose why debates in the philosophy of perception do not seem to “progress”. Like Anscombe, Macdonald (who also studied with Wittgenstein) suggests that “linguistic philosophy” may offer a way forward.

Emmet's claim is that, while there is a sense in which the body is simply part of the "energy system called the physical world", that is not *all* there is the body. It *is* closely embedded within the physical world, but it should not, as a result, be thought of as *removed* from the mind (or the mental realm). As we saw previously, Emmet thinks that our ability to adopt 'experimental attitudes' demonstrates that perceptual activity depends upon the body as well as the mind. In other words, it is a mistake to think of (all) perceptual activity as occurring independently of the body. But here she goes even further, arguing that although the body is interconnected with the physical world, the mind itself is "embodied" (NMT, 60). If the body is part of the physical world, and the mind is "embodied" (i.e. interconnected with the body), then it follows that the mind, too, is interconnected with the physical realm. Thus, views on which the mind and the (external) world are placed at remove from one another are mistaken.

In defending this view, Emmet claims that she is drawing on Whiteheadian insights, including his commitment to the "withness of body" (NMT, 60). But there is another thinker who Emmet seems to be drawing on: Henri Bergson.²⁷ Bergson is only mentioned three times in *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (at NMT, 32, 37, 218). Two of those references are loose allusions, but the first (NMT, 32) makes it clear that Emmet was at least familiar with Chapter One of Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (first published in 1886).²⁸ There, Bergson defends several claims that are echoed in Emmet's views as outlined so far. For instance, Bergson argues that "realism and idealism both go too far" and that it is a mistake to reduce the external world "to the perception which we have of it, [and] a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us perception, but in itself of another nature than they" (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, vii). Thus, like Emmet, Bergson maintains that a middle way between idealism and (naïve) realism should be adopted. As we saw, Emmet claims that phenomenalism comes close to doing this, but ultimately fails.

More importantly, for our present purposes, Bergson also argues that body is uniquely placed at the intersection of mind and world and, consequently, plays a crucial role in our perception of reality. As Emmet notes (NMT, 32), Bergson describes reality (or "the universe") as "a system of images" (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 12) (Bergson's 'images' might be compared

²⁷There is also a case to be made for including Heidegger as one of the influences on Emmet's view. Emmet identifies similarities between Heidegger and Whitehead's approaches to perception. For example, she writes that "[a]lthough the final outcome and emphasis of his philosophy is very different from Whitehead's, both Heidegger and Whitehead are starting from an analysis... of a subject of experience as arising out of a way of feeling its world" (NMT, 65).

²⁸It is also worth noting that Emmet's tutor in Oxford, A. D. Lindsay, wrote a book on Bergson (Lindsay, *The Philosophy of Bergson*) which Emmet may have read. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

with Emmet's 'interpretations', as discussed in Section One).²⁹ He goes on to note that "my perception of the universe ... may be entirely altered by a very slight change in a certain privileged image, – *my body*" and that "at each of its movements everything changes, as though by a turn of a kaleidoscope" (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 12). What Bergson is describing here is very close to Emmet's characterization of 'experimental attitudes'. In both cases, what is being emphasised is the role that the body, along with the mind, plays in determining or shaping our perceptual experiences.

One way of interpreting what is going on in Emmet's account of perception as '*rapport*', then, is that she is using a key Bergsonian insight to respond to the problems that she thinks are inherent in traditional approaches to the philosophy of perception. The textual evidence for such a causal claim is plausible, but not conclusive, since Emmet does cite Bergson, but not extensively.³⁰ What is more, it is still *Whitehead* who she credits as the primary influence on her position, although it is worth noting that Whitehead himself credits Bergson with influencing his own views (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, xiii). Perhaps, then, Emmet is only indirectly being influenced by Bergson, through Whitehead. In any case, what does seem clear is that Emmet is putting the ideas of her predecessors to work to reshape the way we approach the philosophy of perception.

Before concluding, one feature of Emmet's view that is worth outlining is her distinction between what she calls "adverbial" and "accusative" modes of perception (NMT, 42).³¹ Emmet claims that our perceptual experiences can be divided into two kinds, each characterized by the mode (or way) in which things are experienced. She explains that "[t]he adverbial mode is an integral feeling, qualifying a state of experience" while, on the other hand, "[t]he accusative mode is a differentiation of contents of awareness" (NMT, 42). In other words, adverbial perception involves a qualification or modification of the more general, underlying feeling of '*rapport*' with the world we always experience. Accusative perception, meanwhile, is informed by reason and our prior

²⁹Samuel Alexander, in his review of *Matter and Memory*, compares Bergson's 'images' to Lockean 'ideas', but the comparison with Emmet's 'interpretations' seems closer since Bergson's images are involved in actively shaping our perception of reality (Alexander, *Matière et Mémoire*, 572).

³⁰There is more that could be said about the similarities between Bergson and Emmet, and I think a stronger case could be made for a causal connection. The question of why Emmet does not cite Bergson anywhere near as extensively as Whitehead is also worth addressing. The answer may lie in the fate of Bergson's philosophy in Anglophone philosophy, especially after the publication of Russell's "The Philosophy of Bergson". For example, Matyáš Moravec argues that from the 1930s and 1940s onwards, Bergson's philosophy began to be "treated with suspicion" (Moravec, "Taking Time Seriously", 2; see also Vrahamis, "Russell's Critique"). It may well be that, in line with trend, Emmet simply wished to avoid paying too much deference to Bergson's philosophy.

³¹Not only is this important for understanding Emmet's position from a historical perspective but this is also an aspect of Emmet's view that might be taken up by contemporary philosophers of perception. Debates in (analytic) philosophy of perception still typically resemble the debates that Emmet is critical of (see, e.g. Crane and French, "The Problem of Perception"). Those readers who are sympathetic to Emmet's criticisms of such debates might look to her own approach as a way forward – and the 'adverbial' versus 'accusative' perception distinction is an important part of that approach.

understanding (or interpretation) of the world around us. Emmet's point seems to be something like this: we are already intermingled with the world around us, but our awareness of *what* we are intermingled with (i.e. various features of that world) varies depending on the mode (or way) in which we are perceiving those things. When we adopt an experimental attitude (e.g. by turning our head towards a certain sound), we are shifting from one mode of awareness to another – which explains the fact that we can *seem* to be encountering something new, other, or 'transcendent'. As Emmet puts it, "some 'transmutation' takes place ... so that we have not mere conformity of pattern, but some novel experience created out of *how* the organism responds" (NMT, 61). This 'transmutation' is a change from one mode of perception to another.

Emmet uses the example of listening to an orchestra to help clarify this distinction. Adverbial perception is akin to what the untrained listener will hear: "a generalized emotional feeling of pleasure or excitement or hypnotic restfulness" (NMT, 42). Accusative perception, meanwhile, is more like what someone with a trained ear will hear. They will discern

[A]n integral emotional tone, and will also differentiate contents; [they] will be aware of the what the 'cellos are doing, and what the wood-wind, and recognize themes as taken up by the different parts.

(NMT, 42)

Emmet's claim is that everyday experiences of external objects that appear to be *distinct* from us 'causing' us to have certain ideas are in fact instances of adverbial perception. She writes:

[T]he 'direct' mode of perception will be what we have called the 'adverbial' mode; a responsive state of the organism in *rapport* with, or receiving shocks from its environment. These may be accompanied by an integral feeling tone, an 'adverbial' mode of perception which is the result of a *response* to the environment.

(NMT, 61)

For Emmet, then, our everyday experience of perceiving the world around us, even on an adverbial level, is always to some degree active. An organism, like a human body, is in '*rapport*' with the rest of its environment – it is 'intermingled' with other features of the wider world – and, in turn, *responds* to that environment. When we have new sensations (e.g. the feeling of pain when I stub my toe) what I am feeling is my body's *response* to a certain aspect of its environment, a shift from one mode of awareness to another, but not something truly unconnected or unrelated to it. Such sensations *are* new, even though they are prompted by something with which we already intermingled, because they at least partially arise out of our own creative activity. This, she thinks, is what accounts for the everyday experience of external objects appearing to 'cause' ideas (or sensations or perceptions) in our minds – an idea that lies

behind what Emmet calls “causal theories of perception” (NMT, 63). Emmet is critical of theories that employ the language of “causal efficacy” (including Whitehead’s) because such language suggests a separation between (external) ‘causes’ in the world and (internal) ‘effects’ in the mind. Emmet’s own language of different ‘modes’ of perception does not evoke such a separation.

What are the advantages of Emmet’s theory of perception as ‘*rapport*’? Her theory promises a way around what she sees as the impasse faced by traditional approaches to the problem of perception that try to make sense of the correspondence relation between the mind, on the one hand, and the world, on the other. For example, traditional sceptical worries about the ‘evil of ideas’ are avoided. Emmet’s approach does away with the need to identify *what the relation between mind and world is* – it is a relation of ‘intermingling’ – and instead encourages us to focus on the character of our intermingled relations with the rest of reality. Depending on the nature of those relations, some of our perceptual experiences will be adverbial and some will be accusative. Emmet’s theory may bring with it its own unique challenges and problems, but it does, she thinks, move us away from making the mistake of trying to answer a question ‘*mal posée*’.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out with two aims: to outline Emmet’s account of perception and, in doing so, to demonstrate that she is an original thinker worthy of further study. I have shown that Emmet’s account of perception is part of a wider endeavour to usher in (sometimes radical) changes in the way that traditional problems of metaphysics are approached, at a key juncture in the development of twentieth-century British philosophy. More specifically, I have argued that Emmet is pushing for a paradigm shift in philosophy of perception. That shift is from a paradigm in which the aim is to explain how we move from ‘contents of awareness’ to a mind-independent reality, to a paradigm that takes seriously the insight that our minds, like our bodies, share an intersubjective relation of ‘*rapport*’ with the rest of reality.

Clearly, Emmet’s position is not *sui generis*. As she acknowledges, she builds on what she takes to be key insights from Whitehead. I have also made the case for thinking that Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* is an important influence on her views. But this does not undermine the claim that Emmet is an original thinker; after all, no philosopher’s views emerge *ex nihilo*. Whitehead himself drew on Bergson and the American pragmatists, whose own views, inevitably, have their own genealogy (for example, see Stebbing, *Pragmatism and French Voluntarism*). In fact, by tracing lines of influence and acknowledging where Emmet’s debts lie, it is possible to discern more clearly what is original in her thought. In the context of the issues dealt with in this paper, the originality of Emmet’s position lies in the way that

she attempts to use insights from Whitehead and Bergson, as well her own observations about ‘experimental attitudes’, to push philosophy of perception in a new direction. Her motivations for doing so are both the wider crisis of metaphysics facing British philosophy in the shadow of verificationism and the problems that she identifies with approaches to the philosophy of perception that address a question ‘*mal posée*’.

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